

Message Text

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13

ACTION NEA-12

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R 100722 Z MAR 73

FM AMCONSUL BOMBAY

TO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 3673

AMCONSUL MADRAS

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

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E. O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT

SUBJECT: BOMBAY MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY: CONGRESS NOT ONLY FAILED OBTAIN EXPECTED ABSOLUTE MAJORITY BOMBAY MUNICIPAL CORPORATION ELECTIONS BUT LOST HEAVILY TO OPPOSITION IN THE PROCESS. END SUMMARY

2. ELECTIONS TO 140 SEAT BOMBAY MUNICIPAL CORPORATION HELD MARCH 9. ALTHOUGH CONGRESS WON 24 OF BOMBAY'S 28 SEATS IN 1972 STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS, CONGRESS NOT ONLY FAILED OBTAIN HOPED- FOR ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS BUT LOST 16 OF PREVIOUSLY HELD 61 SEATS IN THE PROCESS. BOMBAY- BASED SHIV SENA (ADVOCATING JOBS FOR MAHARASHTRIANS) CAME IN CLOSE SECOND WITH 39, INCREASING ITS SEATS BY 4. JANA SANGH INCREASED ITS SEATS FROM 6 TO 15 AND MUSLIM LEAGUE RE- EMERGED AS POLITICAL FORCE BY INCREASING ITS SEATS FROM 2 TO 16. SOCIALISTS TOOK ONLY 8 SEATS, LOSING 2, OLD CONGRESS WON 4, AND INDEPENDENTS 9. CPI INCREASED ITS SEATS FROM 2 TO 3 AND CPM GOT ONE.

3. COMMENTS: RESULTS WERE UNEXPECTED AND CAME AS SURPRISE LOCALLY SINCE CONGRESS HAD GENERALLY BEEN EXPECTED INCREASE
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ITS SEATS. WHILE TOO MUCH SHOULD NOT BE READ INTO RESULTS, WE FEEL THEY ARE INDICATION OF WAY WIND IS BLOWING. INCREASES REGISTERED BY OPPOSITION PARTIES AND LOSSES INCURRED BY CONGRESS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED IN CONSIDERABLE MEASURE IN OUR VIEW TO STEADILY RISING PRESSURE ON LOWER INCOME STRATA ON ONE HAND AND GROWING DISENCHANTMENT BY MORE AFFLUENT BUSINESS-ORIENTED COMMUNITY WITH DELHI'S ECONOMIC POLICIES OR LACK THEREOF AS SEEN IN JANA SANGH VOTE. (SWANTANTRA DID NOT ENTER THE FIELD.) FACT IS THAT NOT VERY MUCH HEADWAY IS BEING MADE LOCALLY IN DEALING WITH MAJOR ECONOMIC ISSUES, PARTICULARLY INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT, THE LOT OF LOWER MIDDLE CLASS AND BELOW IS DAILY GETTING TOUGHER, AND THERE IS NOT MUCH TO SUGGEST IT WILL IMPROVE SOON. CONGRESS SUFFERS FROM FACT IT HAS UNDISPUTED POLITICAL POWER BUT IS UNABLE TRANSLATE IT INTO SATISFACTION OF RISING LEVEL OF EXPECTATIONS.

4. SUCCESS OF SHIV SENA HIGHLIGHTS OPPOSITION OF UNEMPLOYED MAHARASHTRIAN COMMUNITY GENERALLY WHICH SEES ITSELF AS DISADVANTAGED MINORITY GROUPING IN BOMBAY (38 PERCENT). JANA SANGH'S SUCCESS REFLECTED SUPPORT FROM BOMBAY'S NON-MAHARASHTRIAN AFFLUENT BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY. MUSLIM OPPOSITION TO RULING CONGRESS LARGELY DUE TO GOI EFFORTS SECULARIZE MUSLIM COMMUNITY.

5. HEAVY ELECTORAL SETBACK TO RULING CONGRESS IN BOMBAY FURTHER UNDERLINES DISSATISFACTION OF URBAN ELECTORATE IN MAHARASHTRA TOWARD THE PARTY. IT LOST A CIVIC BY- ELECTION TO JANA SANGH ON FEBRUARY 25 IN POONA AND LOST MAYOR OF NAGPUR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION THE SAME MONTH. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE CONGRESS IS NOT CONTESTING TWO BY- ELECTIONS TO THE AHMEDABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION GUJARAT DUE MARCH 25 BECAUSE THEY FEAR OPPOSITION STRENGTH.

6. RESULTS UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE COME AS BITTER BLOW TO LEADER OF BOMBAY PRADESH CONGRESS COMMITTEE RAJNI PATEL, A PRO- SOVIET EX- MEMBER CPI WHO WAS PLACED IN HIS POSITION BY MRS. GANDHI IN JANUARY 1972. HE WAS SUPPOSED TO REPRESENT YOUNGER AND MORE LIBERAL FORCES IN CONGRESS AND WAS CONSIDERED EVEN AS POSSIBLE EVENTUAL SUCCESSOR TO CHIEF MINISTER MAHARASHTRA. IN OUR VIEW, MORE CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS OF CONGRESS PARTY LOCALLY ARE UNLIKELY MOURN HIS FAILURE AT POLLS AND MAY WELL USE OCCASION TRY AND PERSUADE PM PICK A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REPLACEMENT.

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